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THE PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNMENT; IN A DIALOGUE BETWEEN A SCHOLAR AND A PEASANT.

WRITTEN BY

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ADVERTISEMENT.

A SHORT defence hath been thought necessary against a violent and groundless attack upon the Flintshire *Committee, for having testified their approbation of the following* Dialogue, *which hath been publicly branded with the most injurious epithets; and it is conceived, that the sure way to vindicate this little tract from so unjust a character, will be as publicly to produce it.—The friends of the Revolution will instantly see, that it contains no principle which has not the support of the highest authority, as well as the clearest reason.*

If the doctrines, which it slightly touches in a manner suited to the nature of the Dialogue, be "seditious, treasonable, and "diabolical," Lord SOMERS *was an incendiary,* LOCKE *a traitor, and the Convention-Parliament a* Pandæmonium; *but if those names are the glory and boast of* England; *and if that Convention secured our liberty and happiness, then the doctrines in question are not only just and rational, but constitutional and salutary; and the reproachful epithets belong wholly to the system of those, who so grossly misapplied them.*

THE PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNMENT; IN A DIALOGUE between a *Scholar* and a *Peaſant*.

P. WHY ſhould humble men, like me, ſign or ſet marks to petitions of this nature? It is better for us peaſants to mind our huſbandry, and leave what we cannot comprehend to the King and Parliament.

S. You can comprehend more than you imagine; and, as *a free member of a free ſtate*, have higher things to mind than you may conceive.

P. If by *free* you mean *out of priſon*, I hope to continue ſo, as long as I can pay my rent to the 'ſquire's bailiff; but what is meaned by a *free ſtate?*

S. Tell me firſt what is meaned by a club in a village, of which I know you to be a member.

P. It is an aſſembly of men, who meet after work every Saturday to be merry and happy for a few hours in the week.

S. Have you no other object but mirth?

P. Yes; we have a box, into which we contribute equally from our monthly or weekly ſavings, and out of which any members of the club are to be relieved in ſickneſs or poverty; for the pariſh officers are ſo cruel and inſolent, that it were better to ſtarve than apply to them for relief.

S. Did they, or the 'ſquire, or the parſon, or all together, compel you to form this ſociety?

P. Oh! no—we could not be compelled; we formed it by our own choice.

S. You did right—But have you not ſome head or preſident of your club?

P. The maſter for each night is choſen by all the company preſent the week before.

S. Does he make laws to bind you in caſe of ill temper or miſbehaviour?

P. He

P. He make laws! He bind us! No; we have all agreed to a ſet of equal rules, which are ſigned by every new comer, and were written in a ſtrange hand by young *Spelman*, the lawyer's clerk, whoſe uncle is a member.

S. What ſhould you do, if any one member were to inſiſt on becoming *perpetual* maſter, and on altering your rules at his arbitrary will and pleaſure?

P. We ſhould expel him.

S. What if he were to bring a ſerjeant's guard, when the militia are quartered in your neighbourhood, and inſiſt upon your obeying him?

P. We ſhould reſiſt, if we could; if not, the Society would be broken up.

S. Suppoſe that, with his ſerjeant's guard, he were to take the money out of the box or out of your pockets?

P. Would not that be a robbery?

S. I am ſeeking information from you. How ſhould you act on ſuch an occaſion?

P. We ſhould ſubmit, perhaps, at the time; but ſhould afterwards try to apprhend the robbers.

S. What if you could not apprehend them?

P. We might kill them, I ſhould think; and, if the King would not pardon us, God would.

S. How could you either apprehend them, or, if they reſiſted, kill them, without a ſufficient force in your own hands?

P. Oh! we are all good players at ſingle ſtick, and each of us has a ſtout cudgel or quarter-ſtaff in the corner of his room.

S. Suppoſe, that a few of the club were to domineer over the reſt, and inſiſt upon making laws for them——

P. We muſt take the ſame courſe; except that it would be eaſier to reſtrain one man, than a number: but we ſhould be the majority with juſtice on our ſide.

S. A word or two on another head. Some of you, I preſume, are no great accountants.

P. Few of us undeſtand accounts; but we truſt old *Lilly* the ſchool-maſter, whom we believe to be an honeſt man; and he keeps the key of our box.

S. If your money ſhould in time amount to a large ſum, it might not perhaps be ſafe, to keep it at his houſe, or in any private houſe.

P. Where elſe ſhould we keep it?

S. You

S. You might chuſe to put it into the funds, or to lend it the 'ſquire, who has loſt ſo much lately at *Newmarket*, taking his bond or ſome of his fields as your ſecurity for the pay with intereſt.

P. We muſt in that caſe confide in young *Spelman*, who will ſoon ſet up for himſelf; and, if a lawyer can be honeſt, will be an honeſt lawyer.

S. What power do you give to *Lilly*, or ſhould you give to *Spelman*, in the caſe ſuppoſed?

P. No power. We ſhould give them both a due allowance for their trouble, and ſhould expect a faithful account of all they had done for us.

S. Honeſt men may change their nature. What if both or either of them were to deceive you?

P. We ſhould remove them, put our truſt in better men, and try to repair our loſs.

S. Did it never occur to you, that every ſtate or nation was only a great *club?*

P. Nothing ever occurred to me on the ſubject; for I never thought about it.

S. Though you never thought before on the ſubject, yet you may be able to tell me, why you ſuppoſe men to have aſſembled, and to have formed *nations*, *communities*, or *ſtates*, which all mean the ſame thing?

P. In order, I ſhould imagine, to be as happy as they can, while they live.

S. By *happy* do you mean *merry* only?

P. To be as merry as they can without hurting themſelves or their neighbours, but chiefly to ſecure themſelves from danger, and to relieve their wants.

S. Do you believe, that any King or Emperor compelled them ſo to aſſociate?

P. How could one man compel a multitude? A King or an Emperor, I preſume is not born with an hundred hands.

S. When a prince of the blood ſhall in any country be ſo diſtinguiſhed by nature, I ſhall then, and then only, conceive him to be a greater man than you. But might not an army, with a King or General at their head, have compelled them to aſſemble?

P. Yes; but the army muſt have been formed by their own choice. One man or a few can never govern many without their conſent.

S. Suppoſe,

S. Suppoſe, however, that a multitude of men, aſſembled in a town or city, were to chuſe a King or Governor, might they not give him power or authority?

P. To be ſure; but they would never be ſo mad, I hope, as to give him a power of making their *laws*.

S. Who elſe ſhould make them?

P. The *whole* nation or people.

S. What if they diſagreed?

P. The opinion of the *greater number*, as in our village-clubs, muſt be taken and prevail.

S. What could be done, if the ſociety were ſo large, that all could not meet in the ſame place?

P. A greater number muſt chuſe a leſs.

S. Who ſhould be the chuſers?

P. All, who are not *upon the pariſh*. In our club, if a man aſks relief of the overſeer, he ceaſes to be one of us; becauſe he muſt depend on the overſeer.

S. Could not a few men, one in ſeven for inſtance, chuſe the aſſembly of law-makers as well as a larger number?

P. As conveniently, perhaps; but I would not ſuffer any man to chuſe another, who was to make laws, by which my money or my life might be taken from me.

S. Have you a *freehold* in any county of forty ſhillings a year?

P. I have nothing in the world but my cattle, implements of huſbandry, and houſhold goods, together with my farm, for which I pay a fixed rent to the 'ſquire.

S. Have you a vote then in any city or borough?

P. I have no vote at all; but am able by my honeſt labour to ſupport my wife and four children; and, whilſt I act honeſtly, I may defy the laws.

S. Can you be ignorant, that the Parliament, to which members are ſent by this county, and by the next market-town, have power to make new laws, by which you and your family may be ſtripped of your goods, thrown into priſon, and even deprived of life?

P. A dreadful power! I never made inquiries, having buſineſs of my own, concerning the buſineſs of Parliament; but imagined, that the laws had been fixed for many hundred years.

S. The common laws, to which you refer, are equal, juſt, and humane; but the King and Parliament may alter them when they pleaſe.

P. The

P. The King ought therefore to be a good man, and the Parliament to conſiſt of men equally good.

S. The King alone can do no harm; but who muſt judge the goodneſs of Parliament-men?

P. All thoſe whoſe property, freedom, and lives may be be affected by their laws.

S. Yet ſix men in ſeven, who inhabit this kingdom, have, like you, no votes; and the petition, which I deſired you to ſign, has nothing for its object, but the reſtoration of you all to the right of chuſing thoſe law-makers, by whom your money or your lives may be taken from you. Attend, while I read it diſtinctly.

P. Give me your pen—I never wrote my name, ill as it may be written, with greater eagerneſs.

S. I applaud you, and truſt, that your example will be followed by millions. Another word before we part. Recollect your opinion about your club in the village, and tell what ought to be the conſequence, if the King alone were to inſiſt on making laws, or in altering them at his will and pleaſure.

P. He too muſt be expelled.

S. Oh! but think of his ſtanding army, and of the militia, which now are his in ſubſtance, though ours in form.

P. If he were to employ that force againſt the nation, they would and ought to reſiſt him, or the ſtate would ceaſe to be a ſtate.

S. What, if the great accountants and great lawyers, the *Lillys* and *Spelmans*, of the nation were to abuſe their truſt, and cruelly injure, inſtead of faithfully ſerving, the public?

P. We muſt requeſt the King to remove them, and make trial of others; but none ſhould implicitly be truſted.

S. But what if a few great lords, or wealthy men, were to keep the King himſelf in ſubjection, yet exert his force, laviſh his treaſure, and miſuſe his name, ſo as to domineer over the people and manage the Parliament?

P. We muſt fight for the King and for ourſelves.

S. You talk of fighting, as if you were ſpeaking of ſome ruſtick engagement at a wake; but your quarter-ſtaffs would avail you little againſt bayonets.

P. We might eaſily provide ourſelves with better arms.

S. Not ſo eaſily: when the moment of reſiſtance came, you would be deprived of all arms; and thoſe who ſhould furniſh you with them, or exhort you to take them up, would be called traitors, and probably put to death.

P. We

P. We ought always, therefore, to be ready; and keep each of us a ſtrong firelock in the corner of his bed-room.

S. That would be legal as well as rational. Are you, my honeſt friend, provided with a muſket?

P. I will contribute no more to the club, and purchaſe a firelock with my ſavings.

S. It is not neceſſary—I have two, and will make you a preſent of one with complete accoutrements.

P. I accept it thankfully, and will converſe with you at your leiſure on other ſubjects of this kind.

S. In the mean while, ſpend an hour every morning for the next fortnight in learning to prime and load expeditiouſly, and to fire and charge with bayonet firmly and regularly. I ſay every *morning*; becauſe, if you exerciſe *too late in the evening*, you may fall into ſome of the legal ſnares, which have been ſpread for you by thoſe gentlemen, who would rather ſecure game for their table, than liberty for the nation.

P. Some of my neighbours, who have ſerved in the militia, will readily teach me; and, perhaps, the whole village may be perſuaded to procure arms, and to learn their exerciſe.

S. It cannot be expected, that villagers ſhould purchaſe arms, but they might eaſily be ſupplied, if the gentry of the nation would ſpare a little from their vices and luxury.

P. May they return to ſome ſenſe of honour and virtue!

S. Farewell, at preſent; and remember, "that a free "ſtate is only a more numerous and more powerful club, "and that he only is a free man, who is member of ſuch "a ſtate."

P. Good morning, Sir! You have made me wiſer and better than I was yeſterday; and yet, methinks, I had ſome knowledge in my own mind of this great ſubject, and have been a politician all my life without perceiving it.

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